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CONVERSATIONS WITH A SOLITARY.

PART III.

SCENE as before. Alison and Franklin are sitting together after luncheon.

FRANKLIN.—How the day has changed since the morning! The sky has become like lead, and—yes, I thought so—there is a spot of rain on the window. A sudden blight seems to have fallen upon everything. One would almost fancy one was looking at a different world.

ALISON.—I foresaw something like this as we were coming up from the rocks. The wind had shifted even then, and the trawlers, as you noticed, were being got ready for sea. How pleasant the breeze sounded, flapping the red sails!

FRANKLIN.—I was thinking less of the sails than of the sailors. What fine, bold faces, and what muscular chests and arms! If your grottoes of this morning might be the homes of Greek sea-nymphs, these Jersey fishermen might well be the descendants of vikings.

ALISON.—They not only might be: they very probably are. All the same, I am surprised to hear you say so.

FRANKLIN.—Surprised? May I ask why?

ALISON.—Because, according to your ideas, they might as well be the descendants of counter-jumpers. It is surely the Radical view that descent is nothing more than an accident. I am surprised, too, that a Radical should think it any praise to a fisherman to say of him that he looked as if he had a monster like a king for his father.

FRANKLIN.—Kings would not be monsters, they would be models, if they really were the fathers of fishermen; and when our next Royal Highness asks to be settled in life by the nation, I would willingly support a parliamentary grant to him of a fishing-smack. However, to be serious: as regards the question

of descent, Radicals are by no means so irrational in their views as you imagine them. Hereditary qualities they acknowledge and would utilize; all they object to is hereditary prestige. A healthy father and mother will have, probably, healthy children; but if you wanted an active laborer, you would not employ a cripple merely because he happened to be born of muscular parents. It is precisely because we believe so strongly in natural distinctions that we are resolved as soon as possible to do away with artificial distinctions.

ALISON.—The question is, how far do natural distinctions descend; or, how far, in other words, do artificial distinctions coincide with them? So far as political capacity goes, you and your party think they do not coincide at all. I was surprised, therefore, at a man, who ridicules the idea of a race of hereditary politicians, taking so naturally to the idea of a race of hereditary sea-farers.

FRANKLIN.—I am glad you have brought me back to the point we started from; but, in the first place, let me set you right about one thing. No Radical denies that the son of a great politician may, in many cases, inherit his father's talents; and when this happens every Radical will be delighted. Practically, however, such an event is an accident; and I certainly do call ridiculous any social institutions which presume it as a certainty. With regard to these Jersey fishermen, the question is different. Physical peculiarities descend far more calculably than mental. High cheek-bones are inherited, when high thoughts are not; and you can tell the son of a Chinaman more easily than the son of a genius. But if you ask me to explain seriously the allusion which I made just now to the vikings, I was thinking of something far more certain than the heredity of any congenital qualities whatsoever. Let us hold what views we will as to birth, we can none of us doubt the results of early habit and education.

ALISON.—On the contrary. The results of education are to me doubtful in the extreme.

FRANKLIN.—I am not speaking now of the education given in board-schools; though if we were, I should be well prepared to defend it. I am speaking of the education that comes from the practice of any calling, and the results of it, in that sense, even you must admit to be calculable. Now it is quite true that I have never seen any vikings; but we all of us have at least some conventional notion of them; and if these fishermen struck

me as being like their descendants, it was because they struck me as the inheritors of a very similar education. Of course, that chance fancy of mine is in itself not worth talking about; but the truth that lay at the bottom of it is one of the first importance. Of the physique of the fishermen, something, no doubt, is due to race; but even of that, not all; while, as to their other characteristics, education may claim nearly the whole of them. Do you remember that huge man, with the red handkerchief round his neck, whom we both of us just now noticed, as he sang, while arranging his nets, what sounded like some Norse sea-song? Well—his blue eyes, his fair hair, and his stature—these, no doubt, he had as a birth-right from his parents. But his cheeks of ruddy bronze—to what did he owe them? To his parents, or to the sun and the sea winds? While, as to his hardihood, his endurance, his presence of mind in the face of special dangers, his insensibility to many things that to other men would be intolerable,—still more plainly does he owe these not to birth, but to education. Suppose that same man had a twin brother, brought up in a city office, who went daily to and from his work in an omnibus, and spent his evenings at a music-hall or in the pit of a theater. How different even in look, still more in character, would the clerk be from the fisherman! Nature to each would wear a totally different aspect, each would meet it with a different front and feelings—with a different standard of what is painful, neutral, or pleasurable; so that what to the fisherman is a healthy life and livelihood, would be first a terror and then death to the clerk. You may be sure that the clerk, had I met him in our morning's walk, would, in spite of his birth, have suggested few thoughts to me of the vikings.

ALISON.—Perhaps not. All the same I believe that such a clerk as you speak of would have all his brother's special faculties dormant in him; and that a few weeks' experience of the ancestral life would show him possessed of every ancestral aptitude. I do not mean that in so short a time he would have mastered all the details of a fisherman's special knowledge, or that he would prove to have been born with a chart of the coasts of Jersey, ingrained like a strawberry-mark in his soul's inner consciousness. I speak merely of those striking general qualities, such as courage, presence of mind, and physical endurance which you attribute to his brother.

FRANKLIN.—You mean that there would exist in him, solely in virtue of his parentage, and wholly apart from early example and education, a natural taste for the sea, a natural indifference to and familiarity with its perils, and a natural callousness to the hardships of wave and weather?

ALISON.—Such is my faith in the virtue of pure blood, no matter whether it be that of fisherman or aristocrat. Surely you ought to agree with me—you, who are a disciple of Darwin.

FRANKLIN.—The importance of what you call pure blood, whatever it may be in the case of pouter pigeons and race-horses, is less in man than in any other animal, and is confined almost to his lower and less human qualities. Amongst the civilized races, at all events, its effects are hardly appreciable, when compared with those of education. Did not the scholars and saints of the Middle Ages rise continually from the rank of serfs and peasants? Even feminine beauty, which no doubt does run in families, owes much to similarities in post-natal circumstances; and what foolish novelists call the “patrician type” buds, though it may not blossom, among the families of the people. But to come back to the fishermen. Can you think, even for an instant, that any man who has never experienced hardship can be born insensible to it? Will one who has held a pen all his life in an office acquire suddenly the horny hands of a sailor? Will one who has been sheltered from every draft of air and from every shower not feel intolerable the squall and the driving foam? These things to the fisherman, though not pleasant, are merely part of the wear and tear of existence. He climbs the mast as indifferently as his brother, the clerk, mounts an omnibus; and he has the same sort of liking for the sea that his brother, the clerk, has for London. But why? Not because he is his father’s son, but because he has been his father’s companion; and that character which you think he inherits, it has really taken years of a special life to fabricate.

ALISON.—According to your view, then, if some half dozen brothers were adopted from the cradle by as many different foster-parents, they might be so brought up as to present no trace of any common relationship, either to the same actual parents or to the same class. They might be different, not only in tastes, in habits, and in thoughts, but even in physical capacities and constitutions. Different kinds of food, different modes of life, would be pleasant to them. To the palate of one anything but

Château Margaux might be distasteful; to the palate of another, anything but gin or beer. One might be a sailor with a frame, as you say, insensible to what we call hardship; another might be so organized that he would really feel as a hardship what would, to most men, be merely the absence of a luxury.

FRANKLIN.—Of course, as I said before, descent, though not much, is something. Some children are born cripples, or idiots; here and there, again, is an infant Hercules. But taking the average of mankind among the civilized races, I should say that in their cradles all classes were equal; and that the average baby, whether born of peer or peasant, was the raw material out of which peer or peasant might be made.

ALISON.—And you think this truth so clearly proved, that a person like myself can be blind to it through class prejudice only?

FRANKLIN.—I have no wish to overstate the matter. I think it possible for a man, quite apart from prejudice, to believe in inherited differences somewhat more than I do; but when these are compared with the differences produced by education, I believe that, apart from prejudice, no one would think them great enough to be of any practical importance, still less to justify any formal recognition of them by society.

ALISON.—And supposing a man—myself, for instance—to have got rid of his prejudices, and thus to see the question as you do, you believe that, if he is honest and logical, he will become a Radical, as you are?

FRANKLIN.—I do believe so, most certainly. As for prejudice, or what Herbert Spencer calls the class-bias, the extent to which it hides social truths from us is notorious; nor do I wonder at its effects, nor in all cases blame the sufferers from them. Still, when you gravely tell me that a man brought up as a cockney would, simply because he was born of a long line of sailors, prove a seasoned sailor himself the moment he set foot in a fishing-smack, I must confess that you seem to be intentionally allowing your prejudice to run away with you; if, indeed, I am really to believe you serious.

ALISON.—My dear fellow, that's the very thing you are not to believe. Of what I said to you about the clerk and the sailor, prejudiced as I am, I did not mean a word.

FRANKLIN.—It tends, perhaps, to make discussion a little difficult, if one of the disputants is reasoning from a proposition which he admits to be meaningless.

ALISON.—Don't be offended. I was not playing the fool with you. I merely told a lie, that I might draw from your own lips as strong a statement as possible of what I, like you, think the truth. There are certain claims, no doubt, which I should make for birth, and which you would disallow. But compared with the claims of education they are, as you say, insignificant; and for argument's sake I will cede them altogether. Yes, education, — we are not talking, remember, of schools, but of the education that comes of all formative experience — the education of board and bed, the education of business, of labor, and of association, — education in this sense of the word is indeed the main power which fashions the raw human material, if not into different characters, at least into different classes. I grant you all this, I say, for argument's sake; I grant you most of it for the sake of truth; and yet, for all this, I am not a Radical.

FRANKLIN.—You mean that, in spite of what you have just now admitted, you are still an advocate of hereditary rank and privilege? You think it right that some men should feel themselves born to rule and others born to submit? I can conceive your maintaining that the son of a rich father is, from superior opportunities, more likely than the son of a poor man to acquire capacities for government. Myself, I should demur even to this; but you, I conceive, mean more than this. You mean that not only is the son of a rich man better than the son of a poor man; but that the descendant of ten rich men is better than the son of one.

ALISON.—I do; though I should allow, with the utmost liberality, for exceptions.

FRANKLIN.—And yet you admit that, on the average, in our cradles we all are equal; and that the baby who numbers twenty earls as his ancestors, is not socially different from the baby of a village grocer.

ALISON.—For argument's sake I admit it. You need not look at me so suspiciously. I am perfectly serious now. All are equal when they are babies crying in cradle. I admit this; and you wonder I am not a Radical. When babies govern us, and when society consists of babies, I will become one instantly — then, but not till then.

FRANKLIN.—That is well enough for a retort; but retorts are not arguments.

ALISON.—On the contrary, whether it be a retort or no, it is an argument of the gravest and most matter-of-fact kind.

Let me put my own position a little more plainly before you. Here we are — having come there by another route — at exactly the same point where we broke off our discussion this morning. I maintained, if you recollect, that those feelings between class and class, which are somewhat analagous to those of lord and vassal, and which it is the main desire of you Radicals to eradicate, are in reality the very soul of national life; and that, though as time goes on they will naturally undergo many changes, to destroy them would be to destroy civilization.

FRANKLIN.—Am I to take you literally? or are you again trying to play upon me?

ALISON.—I am trying to be as sober as possible, and to speak with as little exaggeration.

FRANKLIN.—You think, then, that to abolish the House of Lords would ruin the trade of England, and make us all once more savages?

ALISON.—The House of Lords is but a sign of our civilization; our trade and wealth in themselves are merely the soulless body of it.

FRANKLIN.—Our civilization, I think, must be in a bad way, if the House of Lords is a sign of it.

ALISON.—You are now doing what a moment ago you said I was. You are using retorts, not arguments. Why should you be angry or irritated with me? Bear with me patiently, at least till I have explained my meaning, which as yet, I fear, I must have done very imperfectly. With regard to the House of Lords, I can conceive of its being abolished, or of its powers being modified, on the most conservative grounds. The significance and the effect of its abolition or its continued existence will, either of them, depend entirely on the grounds on which it is attacked or defended. I must, however, run the risk of annoying you by saying that, should it be abolished on the grounds which are put forward by you,—should its abolition, if it took place, indicate the triumph of your special principles,—its abolition would, in my judgment, be a sign of a gradual relapse on the part of England into barbarism. Let me put the matter more plainly yet. I was not speaking of the House of Lords nor thinking of it; it was you who brought it into the conversation. Since, however, I responded to your implied challenge about it, I must tell you in what spirit I spoke of the House of Lords, not in any way as a part of the English constitution, but as a

convenient symbol of the structure of English society ; and, regarding it in that light, what I have to say is this : The reason for which I mainly value it is the very reason for which Radicals mainly hate it. I value it because it is a symbol of the loyalty of class to class — of submission on the one side, and care and patronage on the other ; because it is a public, a national acknowledgment that men are not equal, but that some are born to serve, others to rule ; and that, exceptional cases apart, we all come into the world with our wants, our pleasures, our duties, and our ambitions circumscribed for us by the station into which we are born. See, I have put my case strongly ; and I think, by this time at any rate, you must understand me. I am much obliged to you for having listened to me so kindly ; and now treat me as I have treated you. Put your case strongly also ; and however irrational, inhuman, stupid, selfish, dishonest, or brutal you think my views to be, do not scruple to tell me. Recollect, too, that with regard to equality in the cradle, we are both of us taking our stand on exactly the same premises.

FRANKLIN.— A few moments ago, you thought that what you said irritated me. Let me beg you to believe I am not speaking in irritation now. I am obliged to make this preface, for I certainly shall speak strongly. That view of life, then, which you insist I am to accept as your own, seems to me a negation, at once cruel, stupid, and hopeless, of everything in the social order which, in these days, makes the idea of society tolerable, which benevolence wishes, which reason demands, and which the course of events is accomplishing. I will not indulge my feelings farther in any indignant generalities. These are enough, and indignant enough ; I will now explain them in detail. What the Radical believes, and what you, too, say you believe, is that Nature, when she sends children into the world, is no respecter of classes. Sweeping aside, then, the dreams of class superstition, what really differentiates, and what really graduates men, is not their birth, but their life.

ALISON.— Excuse my interrupting you ; but so long as men are born to unequal fortunes, their life will be differentiated and graduated by the accident of their birth ; nor will they any the less be divided into different classes.

FRANKLIN.— If you listen, you will see that that is the very point I was coming to. Of course, there will be different classes so long as civilization lasts. No Radical is such a fool as to

think there will not. As long as knowledge lasts there will be thinkers and men of science; as long as men eat fish there will be fishermen.

ALISON.—And do I not gather from what you just now said that the man of science and the fisherman will be so far different beings, that not only their happiness, but even their health, will depend on social conditions of a widely different character?

FRANKLIN.—Surely that is what I began our conversation with insisting on. If physical labor were as hard to the physical laborers as it would be to those whose labor is mainly mental, we should have to regard civilization itself as criminal. You seem to imagine, however, from the tone in which you urge this fact on me, that there is something in it that is inconsistent with my position. That shows how imperfectly, even yet, you grasp what that position is. We do not say there is to be no difference in classes, any more than we say that there is no difference in capacity; but what we declare to be the truth, and what we desire to see recognized as being the truth, is that class depends on capacity, not capacity on class. We do not think that any fisherman's child can become a prime minister; but we should wish every fisherman's child to be conscious that, did his talents and opportunities fit him for the career of politics, there would be nothing incongruous, nothing unusual, in his aiming at or attaining the very highest offices of state. So, too, with regard to social distinctions (supposing their continued existence), we should wish every fisherman's son to feel that, had he social talents and social opportunities, there is no company, no matter how brilliant, with which he would not have a natural right to mix.

ALISON.—If that is what you mean, your millennium has begun already. Surely in politics, even you must be satisfied with the number of men who are wholly without pedigree, and I might say the same thing, very nearly, of smart London society.

FRANKLIN.—Yes, things are moving in the right direction; but before *we* are satisfied, they have far to move yet. As to smart society, I mentioned that as an illustration of my meaning merely, not as any part of the substance of it; but as an illustration it is exceedingly useful. I heard the other day of a man, of what you would call high family, who had been honored

at the house of a great Liberal peer, by meeting at dinner several of the most brilliant thinkers of the day, and on some one remarking to him how the fine ladies present paid court to them, "It is the distinguished thing now," he said, "not to have had a grandfather."

ALISON.—Such a sneer, on his part, seems to me to have been rather vulgar.

FRANKLIN.—I am not concerned with its vulgarity, and I am not quoting it as a sneer. Let me suppose it to be the literal truth. What I want to tell you is this: It is not a truth with which any Radical would be satisfied. We no more want it to be a distinguished thing not to have had a grandfather than to have had one. We want the matter to be one of total indifference, and the position of a man's parents to be of no more social importance to him than the color of their eyes, or the number and length of their hairs. Here is another small point I may mention. How often, in England, does one hear the families of farmers laughed at for living, not beyond their means, but beyond their station! Again, a certain pomp of life, which would be thought quite natural in a duke, would be thought ludicrous in an opulent butcher who could equally well afford it. Now, as for myself, in my own house I have nothing but maid-servants: the present question, therefore, does not touch me. But though I am no apologist for pompous living in any one, I may say that, in the state of society which Radicals are laboring to realize, it will, among those who can pay for it, be thought quite as becoming or as unbecoming in one man as in another. At present, it is thought to symbolize in the duke's position some underlying reality which in the butcher's has no existence. The Radical desires that this so-called reality should be frankly recognized as having no existence in either case. Again, let me remind you that I mention these special matters, not for their own sake, but for the sake of the view of society they symbolize; and I hope that, if you take them in that light, they will have at last made my meaning clear to you.

ALISON.—The general meaning you have in your own mind is, I think, perfectly clear to me. As to the practical application of your principles I am not quite so clear. Benevolence, you say, wishes their application, and reason demands it. As to why this should be so, I confess I am as dark as ever.

FRANKLIN.—Must I really, then, draw my inference for you? Is that so? Is it not self-evident? It was well said, the other day, in a Radical English newspaper, that the practical watch-words of the Radical party are these: "Promotion by merit," and "The tools to him who best can use them." Apply this, not to politics only, but to every distinction, to every labor of life—and there you have the practical meaning of Radicalism—of freedom, of justice, of progress. All men are born equal,—that we both acknowledge,—not personally, but socially. Let each man, then, be free to be what he can make himself. Let no man say, "Because I am the son of a fisherman; therefore it is presumption in me to aspire to be more than a fisherman." Talent, ambition, aspiration are on all sides of us—among poor and rich alike. Let a career be open to them indifferently, wherever they are. Let us all feel, not that we can all take the highest prizes in life, but that we are, each of us, equally free to take the highest prize that we can merit.

ALISON.—Thank you. That is quite plain enough. Let me now ask you a question or two. All men are equal at birth, whether their parents are rich or poor?

FRANKLIN.—We have both agreed as to that. It is the admission we start from.

ALISON.—How long, then, does this equality last? How soon does the brain and body of the fisherman begin to differentiate itself from the brain and body of the clerk?

FRANKLIN.—Hitherto we have said nothing of education in its technical sense. I am now coming to that. Without such education, most children will very early take a permanent bent according to their early surroundings, and it will be difficult for their ideas or their natural talents to extend themselves beyond the circle of their parents' life and occupations. But education prevents this premature fixing of the character. It opens a boy's eyes, so that, before his lot is chosen, he is aware that, for the resolute, there are many lots to choose from; he is able to ask himself for which he is best fitted: thus his destiny is—partly, at least—placed in his own hands; and if his talents fail to meet with what he thinks their fitting reward, he will not have to revile society with having failed to do justice to him, but to settle with his own conscience, because he has failed to do justice to himself. Thus wealth and all distinction being recog-

nized as the reward of merit, wealth and distinction will excite no envy—or, at all events, but little, and only in exceptional natures.

ALISON.—Is the rich man's child reaping the reward of merit when it gradually learns that it has ready prepared for it all those means of pleasure, of learning, and of beneficence, which the poor man's child, should he prove ambitious, must spend half his life in a doubtful struggle to obtain?

FRANKLIN.—Men can well put up with an inferiority in circumstances so long as no inferiority is thought to inhere in themselves. The cardinal social truth, both in the head and in the heart of the Radical is that each man is what he makes himself; and that any man may make himself anything. If riches have helped some to make themselves exceptionally wise or useful, let the rest look up to them as wise and useful brothers. This kind of respect is very different from cringing to a man, not because he has used opportunities, but merely because he has had them. You said just now that I had already made my position plain enough. That is not the case. The most important practical issue of the Radical tone and temper I have hardly done more than mention. Once let these views of society I have been speaking of penetrate all classes, rich and poor alike,—driving away the shadows and the superstitions of Feudalism,—and society will recognize far more clearly than now the extent of the state's duty to the poor in the matter of education. One result, I need hardly say, will be that, for the poor, education will be free; but more than that, and even more important, it will gradually change its character. It will aim not only at quickening the intelligence, but at enlarging the imagination, at giving every young eye a commanding view of life, and impressing every young mind with a sense of social self-respect. In this way we Radicals are hopeful, that, putting aside the question of personal luxuries, the distribution of which it can never be possible to equalize, the children of each generation, be their parents rich or poor, will start in life with their opportunities equalized to a degree which at present is to you almost unimaginable. Now, I think my whole case is before you, and I am ready now to listen to yours, which, so far as I understand it, is a direct negation of mine.

ALISON.—Not quite so. You forget that I am conceding to you that all classes are born equal. But I concede even more

than that. I concede something you have not directly stated, but which of course you imply, that those social and those political arrangements are best which most diffuse happiness, not among the few only, but among all.

FRANKLIN.—Well——

ALISON.—I concede even more than that. I concede—at least, for argument's sake—that education might be so regulated as to produce among the young of each generation as much equality as might exist later in life at the university, between the son of a small tradesman and the son of a millionaire merchant.

FRANKLIN.—Supposing such a pair to be friends, and the one not to despise the other, the equality between them would represent all that I hope or ask for.

ALISON.—I concede, then, that education might produce it—not that I think it would, but for the sake of argument. Now, I boldly, with my eyes and my heart open, declare that, supposing such a consummation possible, I would, were I statesman, do everything in my power to avert it, and I should regard it, did it ever take place, as the greatest of social calamities and the beginning of social dissolution.

FRANKLIN.—Are you serious?

ALISON.—Wait a moment longer, you have not heard me out yet. You would wish, you say, to enlarge the imaginations of the poor, to give their eyes a commanding view of life, and to teach each poor child to think that no lot in life need be beyond its natural ambition. I, for my part, would offer to their eyes not as many careers as possible, but as few. I would have them think that careers and ambitions, both, were fixed for them by their birth within certain well defined limits, and that what lay beyond these limits for them was the moon and stars. You tell me you would enlarge their imaginations. My dear Franklin, I would restrain and chasten them.

FRANKLIN.—What then! And is the son of the laborer to have no hope? Would you say to those who must always be the majority of mankind, "Aspiration is not for you. Among you genius will receive the reward of a crime, and can only beat itself to death against 'its birth's invidious bar'?"

ALISON.—Let us put genius out of the question. Genius will always rise, and will rise the brighter from having made its way through difficulties. We are talking now of the general

run of men ; and if by "aspiration" you mean the desire to rise out of one's station, I should say as a general truth, not to laborers only, but to every other class, "Aspiration is not for you." But since it is the laboring class you allude to specially, let us speak of that ; or, better still, of that section of it which has really formed our text,—these Jersey fishermen, whose red sails at this moment are already dotting the gray surface of the sea. You think—I can see it by your face—you think what I have just been saying is monstrous. I am going to meet you with an *argumentum ad hominem*. Compare these fishermen with yourself. What a contrast in every way. You are full of wishes for the welfare of the world at large, and able yourself to appreciate the high and refined happiness that comes from the exercise of your own intellect, the approbation of your own conscience, and the pure affection of your family ; you desire that such blessings should be diffused. But these fishermen—the objects of your wishes—what do they know or care for all the fine things you wish them ? If you offered them money, no doubt they would clutch at it with a stupid avarice, to which before they were strangers ; but what leisure can be theirs to know anything of the pleasures either of thought, of right doing, or of affection ? If you could abolish fishermen altogether, well and good ; but since you cannot, it is well that you should recognize the fact that, between you and them there is no kind of equality, and that your Radical principles can never, except for harm, alter their condition any more than a dog's.

FRANKLIN.—Suppose you made a speech like that at a public meeting. Would not you be howled down by the indignation of all your hearers ? I do not howl you down ; but my blood boils none the less. Still, I will answer you calmly. In physical constitution, the fisherman and I differ ; our thoughts have been trained to employ themselves on different subjects ; among them I grant there may be worse men, more stupid men, and unhappier men than I. But if so, that is not because they are fishermen. God knows——

ALISON.—I thought you did not believe in God.

FRANKLIN.—Whether I do or no, let the name be a sign of the solemnity and the conviction I am speaking with. God knows, I say, that in those boats yonder, in those cottages below us, by the simple hearth, or among the foam, the ropes, and the fish-baskets, hearts may beat as tender as, perhaps more tender than

mine; lives may be led as happy as mine, and in all human essentials nobler than what I can attain to.

ALISON.—What! does your wealth, your culture, and the power which your wealth gives you—does not that raise you high above these men we are speaking of?

FRANKLIN.—This makes my life different; it enlarges my sphere of action; but it need not make me a truer man, nor, though I am happy, a happier one.

ALISON.—Relax your look of severity. Let your blood cease to boil. In every word you say, I agree with you; and when I spoke just now those words that shocked you, I was not stating any views of my own; I was merely stating what is the logical deduction from yours.

FRANKLIN.—From mine!

ALISON.—Yes, from yours. It is you, not I,—it is the Radicals, not the aristocrats,—who insult the people, and who treat the workman's life as a degradation. Is it not the gist of your gospel that the prizes of life should be open to all—meaning by the prizes, station, wealth, distinction, political power, and so on? and do you not ridicule those who deny your gospel? and do not you call it cruel to say that the man who is born a laborer, must, as a rule, remain a laborer always? Why, if the laborer, in all essentials, can be as happy as the rich man, what cruelty is there in wishing that he should, in most cases, remain as he is?

FRANKLIN.—Have I not said there must always be distinctions of classes? But talent demands for its exercise a wider though not a happier sphere, than that which belongs to the laborer. Let every laborer with talents be free to rise, so as to use them. You tell me these cases are rare, and that we may put them aside as exceptions. In doing that, you are begging the whole question. We can set nothing aside as, properly speaking, exceptional, save genius of the very highest and very rarest order. A percentage of talent in every generation, is the rule, not an exception. Were it not so, civilization could not sustain itself; and you yourself are admitting, quite as fully as I, that among the children of laborers the percentage of natural talent is as large as among the children of the wealthy; that as many are born with capacities for law, art, politics, military command, mechanical invention—what you will. Now, at present, we Radicals think that all this mass of talent lies undeveloped, practically non-existent, lost to the world, through the mal-ad-

justment of society; and it is these sleeping forces that our reforms would set free. Half of the talent of the working classes is scarcely ever conscious of itself; the other half is conscious only to resent the injustice that oppresses it.

ALISON.—Let it be, as you say, that among the millions of the people there is as large a percentage of talent as there is among the thousands or the hundreds of the wealthy; that for every competitor for distinction in commerce, in science, in law, or in politics, that is supplied by the villa or the castle, a thousand others would be supplied by the cottage or the workman's quarter. What then? You will have more men wanting to be lawyers; but you will not make more lawyers wanted. You will have more men wanting office, but not a society wanting more officials. You will be merely multiplying the number of candidates, without multiplying the number of posts, and without, on your own showing, making the quality of the candidates higher. What you do will be simply this: you will multiply failures, you will not multiply successes.

FRANKLIN.—I call it a failure, when a man who is fit for a higher occupation has to spend his life in a lower one; and the world in that sense is peopled with failures now.

ALISON.—Again you are doing it—doing what I just now taxed you with. You are insulting the people—the masses, whose champion you declare yourself to be. Listen to me; I will go even farther than you. I will say that, of the laboring classes, not merely that there is a large percentage born fit for occupations other than manual labor; I will say that, with a few exceptions, this might be said of all of them. There are few men who, if bred to it, might not do more than dig or, to keep to the instance of our fishermen, might not do more than fish. But so long as the earth is earth, and so long as man is man, diggers and fishers the mass of mankind must be; and your fine radical gospel as to rising in life is an exhortation to human society to escape from its own shadow.

FRANKLIN.—You admit that it is a shadow, then?

ALISON.—I admit nothing of the kind. I had no intention that you should take my simile literally. If you like to deplore the lot of the manual laborer as in itself an evil, and one not worthy of a man, you are of course free to do so; but to deplore as an evil conditions which you never can alter is to make these conditions the very curse you say they are. Let us suppose that

labor is an evil. Is not death an evil also? And yet we all can be cheerful—even knaves and cowards—under its shadow; and all but knaves and cowards can be resigned and calm in its presence. Suppose, however, some quack could persuade us that death was due to preventable causes, and could be altogether eluded by some form of revolution, then, indeed, to this generation of dupes, death for the first time would begin to make life a hell. It is the same thing with labor; except that death can never quite lose its sting, whereas labor is a nettle which, if grasped, may turn into a flower. My dear Franklin, I would ask you to lay this to heart—that, in an honest and useful life, its necessary conditions become intolerable only when we are taught to indulge in a false hope that we can escape from them. To go back once more to our exceptions, I should no doubt think it deplorable if a man were to die a carpenter who might have been a Shakespeare or a Raphael; but I should see nothing deplorable in a million men dying carpenters, who, born in a different sphere, would have been first-rate clerks or attorneys.

FRANKLIN.—Supposing you had the technical skill, should you like now to become a carpenter?

ALISON.—Have I had a carpenter's education? According to you, it is education makes us what we are; and the life that would be happy for a carpenter would be miserable to me. I need not answer your question, you have emphatically answered it yourself.

FRANKLIN.—The worth of opinions in these days can best be tested by considering what reception they would meet with, if freely addressed to the democracy. Apply that test for a moment to these views of yours. Would the people listen to you in this nineteenth century, if you were to get up on a platform merely to preach content to them, and to tell them they were doomed for life to the lot they have happened to be born to? Would you tell them that? Or, if not that, what would you tell them?

ALISON.—I would tell them this. I would tell them that the first and the best ambition for each of us, is not to leave our station, but to make the best of it. Bound your ambitions by the limits of your own stations—then every one of you may succeed. Once learn to put your ambitions higher, then all of you—except some very few, will be failures.

FRANKLIN.—Do you think, in these days of education, such a limiting of the ambitions is possible?

ALISON.—That surely depends on what the education is. If education teaches that there are no limits imposed on the individual by the nature of the social structure, then——

FRANKLIN.—Then, what?

ALISON.—Then will be the reign of Radicalism, and that will mean a war against nature.

FRANKLIN.—You have taxed me, in my social scheme, of thinking of what would be best, irrespective of what is possible. Are not you doing the same thing? Is it possible, I ask you, in these days of knowledge (for I will drop the word education, since you think it ambiguous),—is it possible that the intelligent poor shall be blind to the advantage and pleasure, not of riches only, but of power and distinction also, and not do all in their power to deserve and win these for themselves?

ALISON.—This insane struggle of the millions for what can only belong to the hundreds, if once excited, it is no doubt hopeless to check. Hopeless?—I would I might retract the word. There may be hope yet. One thing only can check it.

FRANKLIN.—And what is that?

ALISON.—The strength of the national character; the loyal subordination of one rank to another; and the recognition that, though the highest prize of life—the sense of having done our duty—is open to all, what you call “the prizes of life” can be profitably competed for but by few, and can be possessed but by very few.

FRANKLIN.—And by these arguments you will persuade the English people to bow down to the House of Lords, will you? And you will call that a sign of the soundness of the national character? I wonder what you would say were you in America!

ALISON.—Here you are once more at the unfortunate House of Lords. Franklin, that subordination of class to class I speak of can take many forms; and the forms will vary with each nation's history. I have reminded you already that America is growing; but if all I hear be true, these very virtues are forming themselves in America which you and yours are trying to destroy in England. But why should we continue talking? I can see you are not convinced. Nothing I have said has made the least impression on you.

FRANKLIN.—Nothing. I may as well be frank with you; for

I believe that I represent as well as most people the democratic intellect of the day; and if that be the case, I may well say, on behalf of all us Radicals, "Time is on our side." Be our cause bad or good, it is the advancing cause.

ALISON.—"Time is on our side." Who was it said that?

FRANKLIN.—A great Radical statesman. He took it for his motto.

ALISON.—It is also the motto of Death. Come—after all our quarrelings, we may part agreeing about one thing: that may be my motto also, for Death, who will so soon have dealings with me, will take me away from the evil and the wretchedness that is to come.

W. H. MALLOCK.